

Student struggles in France: tip of the iceberg in the struggle of the world working class

At one and the same time, in France, Belgium, Germany, Italy and Spain, young people of ‘Generation Z’ are rising up against the future of poverty and war that capitalism promises them: *“Ever since we were born, there have been crises”*. In response to the movement in France against social cuts in education – *“6 billion for the army, but not a single cent for schools”* – messages of solidarity are pouring in from all over the world via social media: *“Your struggle is our struggle!”*

Faced with the anger of young people, the only response from governments is brutal repression. In France, one student has lost an eye and another a hand; in Belgium, demonstrations have been banned in the Liège region, yet despite this, 50,000 people took to the streets in Brussels. In Madrid, students have also been beaten during demonstrations in support of the teachers’ strike. In Berlin, young people have held demonstrations against compulsory military service. And in Italy, in Turin, Rome and Naples, students have taken to the streets in solidarity with the struggle in France.

These struggles are the tip of the iceberg of a vast sense of unease and discontent amongst the whole international working class, everywhere faced with the deterioration of our living conditions, with growing militarism and preparations for war: at Airbus and in the education sector in Spain, on the Paris transport network (RATP), in the struggles against cuts in social spending in Belgium and Argentina, or in the textile strikes in Faridabad (Delhi) in India.

Young people in precarious employment are the children of the working class. Their struggle draws strength from the growth in militancy since the “Summer of Discontent” in Britain in 2022, from the fight against the attack on pensions in France in 2023, from reflection and discussions on how to fight, and from the lessons that sacrifices only lead to further sacrifices. And they are fighting for their future, which is under threat from the insoluble economic crisis, war and climate catastrophe.

“On nous vole notre avenir, on refuse de se taire!” (They are stealing our future, and we refuse to be silenced!)

These struggles by young people signify a profound shift in the social mood on an international scale. On the streets, strangers discuss what to do and how to fight; at assemblies and demonstrations, people speak fearlessly of revolution

for the first time in years. This new generation entering the struggle is largely inexperienced, but at the same time it has shaken off the burden of the past – the anti-Communist campaigns following the collapse of Stalinism, and the rejection of political commitment.

Many refer to May ’68 and ask their elders what it was like. What May ’68 and the current situation have in common is, above all, the ability to put forward the prospect of a different society, of an alternative to capitalism. And in that sense, the struggle of young people for the future ties in with a maturing of consciousness – not only amongst minorities, but across the working class as a whole – regarding the prospect of a confrontation with capitalism.

The combined struggle of several generations shows that we cannot expect any improvement from the bourgeoisie’s promises. The attacks on our living conditions are global: wage erosion due to inflation, redundancies, cuts in social benefits, increased work rates and longer working hours, the inability to access decent housing, and a lack of future prospects for our children. Capitalism is sinking into a spiral of crisis, war and ecological disasters.

***“Pas d’avenir, pas de calme”
(no future, no peace)***

That is why the struggle of young people heralds mass struggles by the working class across the world, and particularly in European countries, where workers have accumulated the greatest experience. The workers’ struggle is the only one capable of putting forward an alternative, forging genuine solidarity and demonstrating what true unity can look like

On the radio in France, when a historian was asked when the current student movement would end, his reply was: *“When young people mobilise on such a massive scale, they give voice to what lies beneath the surface of society and herald other social movements to come”*.

That is what happened in May ’68. But back then, it took almost a year for struggles to emerge in neighbouring countries, as was the case with Italy’s “Autunno caldo” (Hot Autumn) of 1969. Today, however, struggles are emerging simultaneously in different countries.

In contrast to the false choice of ‘every man for himself’, the maturing of consciousness is expressed in the attempt to build a united and conscious struggle.

Solidarity, assemblies and extension: the working class's methods of struggle

The recent struggles of young people in Europe have, from the outset, drawn on the historic methods of the workers' struggle and foreshadow the battles that will unfold in future strikes.

In France, university students have gone on strike in solidarity with secondary school pupils; lecturers have formed a human chain to protect students from police repression; family members and many workers have taken part in mass demonstrations, and some in the assemblies; in Spain, it has been the pupils who have expressed their solidarity with the teachers; students in Belgium, Italy and Greece have mobilised in support of the struggle in France. These expressions of solidarity, particularly on an international scale, which were also evident in the Airbus struggle, are the budding seeds of potential future international struggles—which the bourgeoisie fears to such an extent that, in Belgium, it is monitoring the entry of 'radical' elements who might spread the 'French virus'.

The fight to ensure that discussions and decisions take place within the assemblies is central to taking control of the struggle. Assemblies open to all workers and sectors, as well as the unemployed and pensioners. It is a trap to stifle discussions and turn the assemblies into empty shells that merely votes on proposals from the trade unions. The assemblies must clarify the problems of the struggle and make decisions accordingly. The assemblies in Paris and other cities across France have kept the movement going and have sought to expand it. There have been animated discussions in the assemblies faced with the choice between fruitless clashes with the police (as with the fake radicalism of the call to "take Matignon", the prime minister's residence), or sending delegations to the employed workers and calling on them to join the movement. At the big demonstrations in France on 17 October, we had a clear example of how the bourgeoisie uses a massive display of state terror to provoke dead-end acts of violence to discredit the movement, aided by the mass media who present burning and looting as the essence of the protests.

There have also been important debates about trade union calls for days of action or even general strikes, under the guise of a joint struggle, which in reality keep us isolated – each in our own sector, with our own specific demands, behind the banner of our company or our trade union. True extension starts when the assemblies send massive delegations to workplaces to discuss with the workers at each site and bring them into the struggle; when they unite in joint assemblies and defend common demands; when they keep control of their decisions by making sure that committees and sub-commissions are elected and accountable to them.

So far, the main difficulty facing the youth struggles in France is that, despite the widespread feelings of solidarity, unlike in May '68 or the struggle against the CPE in 2006, the struggle has not spread to the workplaces.

"Ce n'est qu'un début, le combat continue!" (This is only the beginning, the struggle continues— slogan from May '68)

If the struggle of proletarian youth does not spread to the working class as a whole (which cannot be entirely ruled out), it will be doomed to failure. But the struggle of the new generation will continue alongside the development of struggles throughout the working class. And it will also continue through attempts – often at first by minorities – to reflect on their experiences and draw lessons from the struggle. Learning from our own struggles not only adds to the strength and scale of future movements, but opens up the path towards an openly political fight for the destruction of capitalism and its replacement by a truly communist society, on a world scale. The path is long and strewn with difficulties, but it is the only one that can give humanity a future on this planet.

International Communist Current, October 2026

Comrades of the ICC have been participating actively in the movement. A significant sign of the maturation of consciousness is the fact that a number of our motions proposing a real extension of the struggle have been adopted by the assemblies. We encourage everyone who wants to reflect on and discuss the ideas in this leaflet to visit our website (www.internationalism.org) and write to us (international@internationalism.org)

We hold public meetings in several countries and languages, online and in person, where we can discuss all these issues directly. Write to us for details.

See our website: en.internationalism.org or
write to: uk@internationalism.org

